

The Sunday School Service.

A. D. ONAGBY.

Aug. 10th, 1884.

Absalom's Rebellion.—2 Samuel 15: 1-14.

GOLDEN TEXT: "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."—Exodus 20: 12.

Introduction.

Twelve years intervened from the time of David's repentance until the transaction recorded in this lesson, and about seventeen since his desire to show kindness for Jonathan's sake. During this time the affairs in Israel assumed a different shape. David was no longer the same honored king among the people. They had lost confidence in him, otherwise not so many would have encouraged Absalom in his rebellion. He had not only lost favor with the people, in consequence of his sin, but with God also, and David's misfortune was a natural result of his transgression, and the thought should be impressed in connection with this lesson, that punishment in some form is the inevitable result of all transgression. But David's sin did not justify Absalom's conduct. An ungodly ambition led Absalom to seek the throne of David. Ambition for office is a weakness common to many, and the evil is not so much in desiring the office, as in the treachery to which men resort in securing the office. The 13th and 14th chapters should be studied in connection with this lesson. They give a brief history of Absalom previous to this time.

LESSON.

Verse 1. And it came to pass after this. After the reconciliation with his father. For two years Absalom with his sons had been at Jerusalem. David had called him there, and, whatever error he committed in so doing, he evinced great sagacity in confining Absalom to his own family and not permitting him to enjoy the presence of the king. Absalom was no doubt secretly meditating the prospect of becoming king over Israel. But being secluded at Jerusalem, he could not advance his cause very rapidly. He forced his attention on Joab by setting on fire a field of barley. Through the influence of Joab, David and Solomon were brought face to face and a reconciliation affected. But it was evidently only a policy stroke on the part of Absalom, for he was then preparing for a rebellion. **Prepared him chariots and horses.** Absalom in thus surrounding himself with horses and chariots made a display and assumed the state of a prince. The horses were rare in that age, and a novelty, and his chariots were of a magnificent style. **Fifty men to run.** People had already become attached to Absalom.

Verse 2. Rose up early. It was customary to transact business very early in the morning, kings waiting at the city gates to hear causes. Absalom took a conspicuous place where the people would come to get redress from the king. Old age and the pressure of other duties caused David to neglect many private individuals and there was a growing feeling of discontent. This gave Absalom an opportunity to make himself popular with the people. He took his station at the city gate and watched the people who brought suits to the king for decision; as they passed Absalom called to them, *Of what city art thou?* He had no real interest in them, his object being only to gain their support.

Verse 3. Thy matters are good. That is, if the judgment of the king be true, the decision will be in your favor. Thus Absalom by his flattery won the support of all the suitors and greatly strengthened his cause.

Verse 4. O that I were made judge! His air of generosity and his promise to advance public interest were he made judge, impressed the people very favorably and they were ready to show that reverence to him due only to the king.

Verse 6. Stole the hearts. David had lost in popularity; people desired a change; he had become negligent, and this, in connection with Absalom's smooth words and generous conduct, won the hearts of the people. He stole them, because he got their support by foul means.

Verse 7. After forty years. Supposed to be only four years from the time he returned to Jerusalem and the beginning of his deceitful practice to gain popularity. **Pay my vow—Hebron.** We have no record of any vow he made, and Absalom was only trying to get permission to leave Jerusalem that he might carry out his plan of rebellion which was now ripening. He chose Hebron as the place, because here he was born and the inhabitants were dissatisfied with David for transferring the capital to Jerusalem. David was willing that Absalom should practice piety, so he gave his consent and blessing.

Verse 8. Abode at Geshur. The place where Absalom had fled after he killed his brother Amnon.

Verse 9. Go in peace. David knew not the evil designs of Absalom, and granted him leave to go to Hebron.

Verse 10. Sent spies. They were to sound the people and find out who were favorable to Absalom, and exhort them to be ready at the blowing of the trumpet to rise up and proclaim him king.

Verse 11. Absalom took with him two hundred men of reputation, to create the impression that the king recognized the movement as legal and that because of age, he was ready to share the government with his eldest son.

Verse 12. Sent for Ahithophel. This was a very prudent step, for Absalom knew that this man was ready to join him because of his disgust at David's conduct toward Bethsheba who was Ahithophel's granddaughter. **Conspiracy was strong.** We must conclude from the rapid growth of Absalom's party that David was no longer the popular and favorite king of the people. There was general dissatisfaction. The remnant of Saul's house was against David. His sin against God and man became pretty generally known. The crimes of Joab and the neglecting in administering justice all were against the king and his government.

Verse 13. Came messengers. The news was already spread far and wide and it was a seeming success.

Verse 14. Arise and let us flee. David was very anxious to save the city which he had beautified and adorned as his capital. By fleeing he would save the city from the horrors of war, and if Absalom's scheme should not prove successful, the city of God would be preserved.

APPLICATION.

1. That the government of David needed a reformation is clear from the anxiety and impatience of the people for a change, but the reformer was to be a different person from that of Absalom. He himself had not the good of the people at heart. He was a selfish ambitious and treacherous young man and his rebellion against David's administration was prompted by motives not at all commendable. Gratification of self was the chief end. Reformers should remember that the most important and first thing to do is the reformation of self. To effect a reformation requires sincerity on the part of reformers.

2. The morbid desire to rule which some people foster leads them to practice the basest arts and most wicked deeds in gaining a position which gives them control over others. Absalom began by the murder of Amnon, his brother, and his desire to gain popularity increased until under pretence of purifying David's administration, he rebelled against his own father, who was a far better man than Absalom himself. The man who makes use of unlawful means in securing position is unfit for it. The cases are few in which the end sought justifies the means employed to secure it. Absalom should have proven by his conduct, his wisdom and ability, that he is better fitted to discharge the functions of the king of Israel than David, but instead he betrays a baseness of character that disqualified him for such a position in life.

3. Honor thy father and mother is a divinely appointed duty, and the promise for obedience to it is, "that thy days may be long upon the land." Irreverence and disrespect for his aged father brought death early on Absalom. A man who has such a lack of filial love, who would thus mistreat a father bowed down with the infirmities of age, cannot be trusted in any relation in life. How shall he be father over Israel who knows not how to treat a father. While we cannot tell "what manner of child this shall be," yet we predict well for that boy or girl who has respect for and obeys father and mother.

4. Absalom concealed his wicked design under a religious cloak. When his plan was ready to execute, he asked David to leave Jerusalem to go to Hebron to perform a religious ceremony. How different his design from what he represented it. Under the pretense of religious duty and the practice of piety, he went forth intending if necessary to wade through the blood of his own father to the throne of Israel. Religious zeal was his cloak, but underneath was the foulest heart. "It is putting religion to too convenient a use when it can be put on or off as a garment." Nothing hides the designs of men so well as a religious coat. Those who are unfriendly to the Christian religion speak evil of it, and use as an argument the misuse people have made of it. They should learn that seeming to be pious and being pious are as wide apart as sin and righteousness. Whenever we take the symbol of the thing for the thing itself then we grasp at a shadow. Religion begins in the heart and grows out, but never in from the outside.

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Notes and Jottings.

The elder who writes in the *Gospel Messenger*, under our caption, is greatly mistaken when he says the love of the brethren toward each other is greatly diminished since our organization upon a gospel basis. In all candor we assert he is not a competent judge. Like his brethren everywhere, he lets prejudice carry him away to that extent as not to read the literature or attend our meetings; hence, when writing about us to his brethren, must do it by the flight of imagination, and starts off by saying that false teachers have arisen, in the persons of our brethren, that are putting forth much effort and receiving accessions in sparing members, etc., etc.

We have worshipped with both the German Baptists and the Brethren, and will say to all interested, that love predominates to a greater degree where the gospel alone shines into the heart. Where the gospel is partially eclipsed with tradition, the subjects are given over to a degree of indifference, and the love which it generates is proportional to the hold these traditions have upon their unfortunate victims; and at all events these traditions annoy the religious work and associations of the German Baptists, while the Brethren bask in the sunshine of gospel light with nothing to divide our affections from the gospel or alienate us from each other. This is our experience. If any doubt it, we ask them to unite with us. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalms 34: 8.

Our meetings and Sunday schools in North Liberty are all we can ask for in attendance and interest. We are happy to report another sister added to our number from the German Baptists. Her husband is out in the cold world of sin, but he is becoming alarmed, and we think, from present indications, he will soon give to the Lord his heart and be numbered with the children of peace and hope. We earnestly pray with sister Daily for the day of joy when her kind husband will say: "Here Lord, I give myself to thee, it is all that I can do."

"Our prospects here are such that give us consolation and encouragement. We feel so grateful to our bountiful Father for help in days past, his promises in times to come. Victory through Christ is perched majestically upon our banner here, and, with the gospel telescope, we can see her upon the hill-tops of glory.

We must tell you that brother Shaffer, of Virginia, is coming with us ere long, and then brother Spanogle, of Pa. Surely, with such faithful workers and the God of Israel for our support, you may rest assured Satan will recoil, truth will triumph, and white winged angels will carry the news to heaven that saints are waxing stronger in battle and sinners repenting of their sins. The records of heaven will be enlarged as the recording angel will write, pardoned through the crimson blood of Emanuel, opposite the names of many dear blood bought sons and daughters. Master, help! R. F. MALLOTT.

Trans-Missouri Flashes.

Do "keep cool", my brother. Heaven means happiness; Hell means the opposite.

Perhaps never in the history of the Trans-Missouri country, were crops better than they are now.

Macedonia cries, "Come to us," from every direction. Will we heed them, brethren? The laity should co-operate with the ministry. See Cor. 5th and 6th chapter.

Wish we had a more thorough system of mission work. I almost feel like urging the convening of another convention on that important matter. Calls come to us so appealingly, and yet we are not able to respond.

This is the time, brethren, to make great efforts and sacrifices in the mission cause. By so doing now, it will not be long till more help will be on hand. Churches can be organized all over the land; but we pioneers must sacrifice to accomplish this work. The more churches we establish the easier the burden of mission support will become, because such churches will become self-supporting and also aid us in advancing still farther into the enemy's territory.

The "adjoining elders" who convened with the church at Falls City, Neb., on the 18th inst., manifested a commendable spirit, only that they indulged to considerable extent in the usual misrepresentation of the position occupied by the Brethren church. We don't blame them so much, as we doubt their acquaintance with Progressive principles. Brethren U. Shick and John Forney made speeches on that occasion, of a very commendable character and they should by all means be heeded.

Brethren, to belong to one church at a time ought to be enough and satisfy us.

And now comes a "Macedonian" call from Jefferson county, Kansas; a place considered impregnable to progression, but rich in inconsistent life, W. J. H. BAUMAN.

Jottings.

In *Gospel Messenger* of July 22nd we find the following from I. J. Rosenberger:

The prophecy, "also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them, has no doubt been in course of fulfillment for many years, but recently it has gone into unmistakable fulfillment." Has I. J. reference to German Baptist elders; it fits no one else in this part of the country?

Again he says:

"Not allowing sisters to wear plain hats is keeping thousands out of the church, has been frequently thrown from the press and pulpit, and was repeated recently in our town. As it was a base assertion, and had never been tested, there was no proof, either pro or con; but as there is now a newly organized body, who practice all the religious ordinances that the brethren practice, and who allow their sisters to wear plain hats, with plain feathers and plain plumes, with jewelry, and ruffles to suit individual tastes, we now hold that the truth of the above statement is being tested and is found not to be true; for it is a fact that this new organization, with much effort, is receiving her additions in sparing members." Does I. J. judge the success of this new organization by the success they are having, since they allow all that he says this new organization allows, and more also? This I think must be the way he arrives at his conclusion; for, by close observance, we know that this new organization with its two hundred and twenty-five ministers and almost intolerant persecution and misrepresentations, a scattered and in some places a small membership, have, from about the first of November to the first of May, averaged about fifty additions by baptism per week, and the German Baptists, with nearly two thousand ministers, have done no better. They averaged about the same per week. So if it be true that this truth in regard to the hat question is being tested, and because plain hats are allowed to be worn by the sisters is the cause that so few are coming to the church, the German Baptists are suffering because of that as much, yea, more than the Brethren are, for they have decided in annual conference that it is wrong for sisters to wear hats; yet, around here, the sisters have all the liberty they could desire for plain hats, with plain feathers, and plain plumes, with jewelry and ruffles to suit their individual tastes; while the Brethren church leaves those things that God has left to our own conscience to decide, alone, believing that a converted man does not need any man made laws in order to his salvation, but will so order his life and character as to meet the divine requirements and pattern.

We cannot see that I. J. has anything to boast of then. We are made to say: physician, heal thyself.

I agree with brethren Garber and Mason in regard to observing the Lord's supper more privately than we have been doing. I also agree with brother Mason in recommending the editorial in No. 28 of *Gospel Messenger*. It is good. ISAAC KILHEFNER.

Ashland, O.

From Lanark, Ill.

H. R. Holsinger:

DEAR BROTHER:—In your report about the Bethlehem Brethren church, at our place, you made a mistake or was misinformed.

"You say: 'Brother Henry H. Myers was expelled from said church against the majority of the church.' The result was that a number of other members withdrew from their church." The facts are these, as best we are able to give them: The elders of northern Illinois made a decision on the first day of the council, and almost every section was rejected by the church, or by a majority of the church. The next morning when the elders came to work with the minority of the church, in order to find out exactly who the members were who rejected their decision. They had all the members come before them one by one, when the following question was put to each one: "Will you retain brother Henry Myers, or will you expel him?" (This had been one of their decisions, the day before, and was rejected by a majority.) But in the morning of the second day, when the question was put as above to each member, the result was, 30 to expel him, and 23 to retain him. The 23 were given time to change their decision until at the close of the meeting.

Afterwards there were two who handed in their resignations. These were the only ones that left the German Baptist church. So you see Henry Myers was expelled really by a majority of the members present, and the 23 were expelled for retaining him as a member, also by a majority. There were other matters voted upon, but this one was the main one. Z. T. LIVEGOOD.

Lanark, Ill., July 27th, 1884.